

Book Reviews

LYDIE BOULLE, M.D. GRMEK, CATHERINE LUPOVICI, and JANINE SAMION-CONTET, *Laennec. Catalogue des manuscrits scientifiques*, Paris, Masson, 1982, 4to, pp. vi, 316, Fr. 200.00.

The scientific manuscripts of Laennec, among them such important unpublished items as his course in the Collège de France embracing all of medicine, or a book on pathological anatomy, are now distributed in five libraries in three French cities. By far the most important holdings are those in the Nantes University Library, described by Mme L. Boule. They form two-thirds of the catalogue. The second largest holding is found in the Paris Bibliothèque inter-médiaire de Médecine (Mme J. Samion-Contet), which represents one-sixth of the catalogue. Every document is listed, localized, and its contents are shortly described. There can be not the slightest doubt about the great importance and usefulness of this catalogue to all those interested in Laennec and the medical history of the period. All the more as it contains three excellent indices (names, subjects, chronology). The catalogue lists also a few manuscripts of his uncle and teacher Guillaume Laennec and his cousins and disciples Mériadec and Ambroise Laennec. It is introduced by Dr M. D. Grmek, whose 1967 catalogue of the Claude Bernard manuscripts served as the model for this catalogue.

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L. SZYFMAN, *Lamarck et son époque*, Paris, Masson, 1982, 8vo, pp. xxiii, 449, Fr. 150.00.

This book has a few virtues, among which are that it includes many long passages taken verbatim from Lamarck's writings, it has several nice plates, the author has recognized the importance of Lamarck's belief in spontaneous generation for the whole of Lamarck's biology, and an entire section has been devoted to Lamarck's "philosophy and scientific methodology". These virtues, unfortunately, are outweighed by the book's failings.

The book contains a wealth of misinformation. William Harvey is said by Szyfman to have been a preformationist, when in fact Harvey was the leading epigenesist of his day. Szyfman says Lamarck *began* his reclassification of the invertebrates by dividing them into ten classes, but Lamarck's writings show quite clearly that he worked on the invertebrates for fifteen years before the number of classes he distinguished reached ten. Szyfman claims that Darwin did not know Lamarck's writings first hand: Darwin's annotations of his copy of Lamarck's *Philosophie zoologique* indicate, to the contrary, that Darwin read at least some sections of that book more carefully than Szyfman has done. Even on the simplest factual matters, Szyfman is unreliable. For example, the reader learns on page 8 that "Lamarck was only 22 years old when he published in 1766 his first scientific work . . .". The reader is later told (p. 47) that Lamarck's first scientific work was published in 1776 when Lamarck was twenty-three! (Not only is Szyfman inconsistent here, neither of the versions he offers is correct. The scientific memoir in question was published in 1776, but by that time Lamarck was thirty-two.) Szyfman also reports incorrectly the publication date of Lamarck's last work on chemistry and the Republican calendar date of the now-famous inaugural lecture in which Lamarck first set forth his ideas on organic mutability. Other flaws in the book include the disjointed arrangement of the chapters, the extreme sketchiness which some important topics (such as Lamarck's views on the evolution of man) are treated, the appearance of several names in the index without any page numbers attached to them, and the pompous preface supplied by Pierre-P. Grassé, which, though brief, is nonetheless replete with its own supply of historical misconceptions and unreliable assertions.

The fundamental problem with this book is that it is a work of advocacy, not a careful historical analysis. The author's chief goal appears to have been to demonstrate the modernity of Lamarck's thought. Where the author does not stray far from Lamarck's own words, the presentation may be satisfactory, as in the section on Lamarck's view of the nature of life. The section on Lamarck's thoughts on extinction, in contrast, misrepresents Lamarck's position egregiously. Lamarck's ideas on chemistry, according to Szyfman, were up to date after all – his quarrels with Lavoisier were only philosophical. In fact, according to Szyfman, some of Lamarck's comments even foreshadowed the later ideas of Mendeleef. Georges Cuvier, not sur-